

New Haven City Hall and Courthouse
Church Street between Court and Elm Streets
New Haven County
New Haven, Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-281

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
801 19th Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

NEW HAVEN CITY HALL AND COURTHOUSE

Location: In the city of New Haven, New Haven County, Connecticut, on the east side of Church Street between Court and Elm Streets, opposite the Green or public square.

Present Owner: City of New Haven

Present Occupant: City of New Haven

Present Use: City Hall, Courthouse, and municipal offices.

Statement of Significance: The City Hall is one of the earliest examples of polychromatic Italian Gothic Revival style in the United States. The Courthouse, adjoining City Hall, was built 10 years later in the same style.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

a. City Hall: City of New Haven since erection by City of New Haven.

b. Courthouse: City of New Haven

2. Date of erection:

a. City Hall: 1861-1862.

b. Courthouse: 1871-2. (See Supplementary Material, page 4)

3. Architect:

a. City Hall: Henry Austin, 1804-1891; Builders, Perkins and Chatfield, Masons; Nicholas Countryman, Joiner. This information is listed on a plaque on the second floor at the top of the stairway.

b. Courthouse: David Russell Brown, 1831-1910; Builders Perkins & Chatfield, Patrick Kennedy, Carpenter. A tablet at the head of the Courthouse stairway states: "Erected AD 1872 under the supervision of County Commissioners Archibald D. Rice,

Richard Dibble, Charles P. Brockett,
Nathan Andrews, Carlos Smith, Committee
of the Bar (5 names), Architect, David
R. Brown, Builders, Perkins & Chatfield,
Patrick Kennedy."

Following is an excerpt from an unpublished paper on
"Trinity Lutheran Church, New Haven, Connecticut," by
Dan R. Anderson, Yale University student, for History
of Art 53a, January 6, 1964.

The architect, David Russell Brown was born (May 30, 1831),
lived, and died (February 21, 1910) in New Haven. When he
was sixteen years old he was employed by Henry Austin, a
leading architect of New Haven at that time. Although
Austin was given credit for the present day New Haven City
Hall, Seymour stated that Austin allowed Brown to design
this building.¹ Unless documents can be found, there is
no sure way of knowing the truth of this statement, but
it seems possible that Brown could have had a considerable
influence in its design. It is interesting to note that
Seymour also stated that Brown got his idea for the New
Haven City Hall from an illustration he found in an English
illustrated publication devoted to architecture.² The
late Professor Carroll Meeks of Yale suggested that the
probable derivation for the New Haven City Hall was the
Parliament House at Ottawa, Canada (1859-1867) by Fuller
& Jones and Stent & Laver.

Brown opened his own office in 1865 and in this capacity
he designed the following buildings: County Courthouse
on Chapel Street, Glebe Building, Church of the Messiah,
Insurance Building on Chapel Street, Armory on Meadow
Street, the Connecticut Building for the Centennial Exhi-
bition of 1876 in Philadelphia, and the Trinity Evangeli-
cal Lutheran Church, New Haven.³ Seymour's criticism of
the City Hall is interesting to note:

This building is certainly open to criticism as
a design and is badly planned; but it was at the
time regarded as a remarkable performance and is
admired by many today, probably because of the
dignity of the structure, due to its size and
location more than to anything else, though it
has beauty of color and combines with the County
Court to produce a fine mass. The bulk of the
tower and the very large window openings, few in
number, also give the building an imposing character.³

¹Seymour, George Dudley, New Haven, New Haven, Conn.,
published privately, 1942, p. 250. Available at the New
Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New
Haven, Conn.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

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4. Original plans, construction, etc.:

- a. City Hall: Henry Austin drawing c. 1861, front elevation, one sheet, is in the New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Conn.
- b. Courthouse: None known.

5. Alterations and additions: The Courthouse was erected in 1871-2. Interiors of both buildings have been somewhat remodeled and subdivided over the years.

6. Important old views: An exterior photograph of City Hall, taken prior to 1867, is in the Art Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Served as New Haven City Hall and Courthouse since 1862 and 1872.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

- a. City Hall: Drawing by Henry Austin, and c. 1867 photograph, Art Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

Edmund Ware Sinnott, The Meeting House of the First Church of Christ in New Haven, Connecticut, Center Church, 1814-1960, published in New Haven, 1960, by the church.

- b. City Hall and Courthouse: Arnold G. Dana, "New Haven Old and New," unpublished scrapbooks, New Haven Historical Society Archives, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut.

Dan R. Anderson, "Trinity Lutheran Church, New Haven, Conn.," unpublished paper by Yale University student for History of Art 53a, January 6, 1964.

Prepared by: Jonathan B. Conant
Research Assistant
National Park Service
August 31, 1964

D. Supplementary Material

1. The New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut, supplied the following information on occupants of the Courthouse since 1873. Source: New Haven City Directories.

1873-1913 Court of Common Pleas and Superior Court
(chief occupants).

1914-1918 Various city offices (Board of Education,
Street Lighting, etc.).

1918-1961 City Court.

1931-1961 Small Claims Court. Remainder of the building
used by the Board of Education, Selectmen's
Office, Legal Aid Bureau, State Board of Harbor
Commissioners, other city offices.

1962 Circuit Court (first listing in New Haven City
Directories)

The State 6th Circuit Court has been occupying
the Courthouse since c. 1959. The State of
Connecticut pays rent to the City of New Haven
for three courtrooms; Criminal Court, Common
Pleas, and Civil. Source: Office of the New
Haven Public Works Division, December 1969.

2. The History and Genealogy Unit of the Connecticut State
Library, Hartford, Connecticut, and the Office of the Mayor,
City of New Haven, Connecticut, supplied excerpts from the
City Year Book (No. 12) of the City of New Haven, For 1872-3.

The Courts were all held in the State House until
in April 1861, Messrs. Alfred Blackman, John S.
Beach, Charles R. Ingersoll, Norton J. Buel, Dexter
R. Wright, and William B. Wooster, were appointed a
committee of the bar to consider the expedience of
removing the courts to the new City Hall, then
nearly completed. Messrs. Wright and Wooster being
absent, and Mr. Buel declining to act, the plans
were prepared by the first three named, acting with
the County Commissioners, Messrs. Edward Parker, A.
E. Rice and Charles Ball, and at the December term,
1862, the rooms were occupied. . . .

The Superior Court continued to occupy the rooms in
the City Hall at an annual rental of \$500. On the

30th of Nov., 1870, the County Commissioners having been notified that their lease, expiring May 1, 1872, would not be renewed, the bar appointed Messrs. Alfred Blackman, Dexter R. Wright, Arthur D. Osborne, John S. Beach and Luzon B. Morris, a committee to confer with the County Commissioners on the subject of providing other accommodations for the courts.

This committee met the County Commissioners, Messrs. A. E. Rice, Richard Dibble and Charles F. Brockett, in December following, when Hon. Alfred Blackman presented the matter to them in a statement so full and convincing that soon after this conference the Commissioners came to the conclusion that a new court house should be erected.

To carry out this purpose the representatives of the county were assembled in the Superior Court room, June 2d, 1871, and a tax of two mills was laid, payable January 1, 1872, for the purchase of a lot and erection of a court house in New Haven. The tax amounted to \$168,100.

Messrs. James E. English, Morris Tyler and Luzon B. Morris were appointed a committee to advise with the Commissioners as to the selection of a site. They unanimously agreed upon the lot adjoining the City Hall, formerly the residence of the late Dr. Jonathan Knight, as the site, and it was purchased for about \$48,000.

The committee of the bar were also requested to advise with the Commissioners in regard to the construction of the building. The interior arrangement and the location having been determined upon by them, David R. Brown, Esq., of New Haven, architect, was employed to prepare plans. How successful he has been can be judged from the beautiful facade, harmoniously united to the City Hall, and the pleasing interior of the building.

The mason work was done by Messrs. Perkins & Chatfield, the builders of the City Hall, and the carpenter work by Patrick Kennedy.

The entire cost of the building was about \$120,000, and including the furniture throughout and the pavement, curbing, and all extras, about \$134,000.

The Court of Common Pleas held its first session in the new court house, January 20, 1873, and the Superior Court, January 27, 1873.

The front is sixty-six feet, including that part which unites it with the City Hall, and the depth is about one hundred and twenty feet. On the first floor are the offices of the Sheriff, County Commissioners, Clerk of Court of Common Pleas, and vault; also, the Common Pleas Court room, with retiring rooms for the judges, the jury and the members of the bar, opening into it.

On the second floor are the offices of the State Attorney, Clerk of Superior Court, and vault, a library and committee room 44x16, and the Superior Court room with retiring rooms similar to those on the first floor.

The third floor furnishes apartments for the Yale Law School consisting of a library, with librarian's and professors' rooms connecting, and a lecture-room 58x25; also, a Supreme Court room, with lobby and ante-room.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The City Hall and Courthouse are noteworthy examples of the polychromatic Italianate Gothic Revival style.
2. Condition of fabric: Exterior surface of City Hall shows some deterioration due to spalling of sandstone. Deterioration of Courthouse exterior surface is slight.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions:

- a. City Hall: The facade is 165'-3". The three asymmetrical sections measure a total of approximately 100' across facade.
- b. Courthouse: The Courthouse^{which} is set back 26'-10" from the front plane of the City Hall tower, measures 64'-10' across the front -- exclusive of an arched passageway which is set back from the Courthouse on the north. Above arched opening between City Hall and Courthouse is a blind screen wall rising to height of Courthouse cornice and forming a ligature between the two buildings. The Courthouse facade is designed with matching flanking sections and a two-bayed center section with a shallow recession above the first floor.

The City Hall and Courthouse each have three and one-half stories. The tower, which is placed asymmetrically on the north corner of the City Hall has four and one-half stories.

2. Foundation: The exterior foundation walls are sandstone. The interior has brick walls and piers supporting heavy timber floor beams.
3. Wall construction:
 - a. City Hall: Center section recedes slightly above second floor between tower and section at right; articulated by vertical buttress members beginning at the third floor.
 - b. Courthouse: Center section recedes slightly above first floor; flanking sections are articulated by vertical buttress members beginning at the second floor.

A bracketed stone balcony with pierced quatrefoil stone rail projects slightly over the courthouse entrance doors.

6. Chimneys: Brick.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

1. City Hall: The three entrances retain the original double doors which have triple traceried lights in each leaf above rectangular panels. The wooden tympana above doors have carved quatrefoils bearing foliate bosses.
2. Courthouse: The two double wooden doors in center section have four panels each. The two tympana are set with clear glass. Double doorway is framed by two pointed arches which spring from polished granite colonnettes.

Gothic arches on stubby columns open on alley passage under shallow two-bayed, two-storied section beyond northwest corner of entire facade. Arches are crowned by foliate crockets with poppy head at apex set against square diaper pattern.

b. Windows and shutters: Windows vary in size, framing and decoration throughout facade. All sash is wooden, double-hung, one-over-one light.

1. City Hall (SW section): First and second floors have two bays of paired windows set under Tudor arches. Mullions and inner arches have rope molding. The third floor has three windows within lancets, their tympana ornamented by foliate bosses within quatrefoils.

(Center Section): Above the main entrance doors there is an arcade composed of eight arches supported on spiral colonnettes. Six openings contain sash.

The two end bays are blind. Above arches is a zone of quatrefoils bearing carved foliate bosses below a subsidiary cornice. The central boss bears the date 1861. The third floor windows are paired within three Gothic arches; tympana are decorated with foliate bosses within quatrefoils.

(Tower section, west and north walls): The first floor windows of the tower are identical with those of the southwest section's ground floor. Three second-floor windows on each outer wall have pointed arches trimmed with narrow dark stone molding. Pair of lancets on each outer wall at third floor level rises to embrace third and fourth floor windows set within paneled wooden tracery. Stone molding outlines the arches. The tower also contains four small square "attic" windows just below the cornice.

2. Courthouse (end bays): Paired and transomed windows flanking entrance doors are framed by superposed colonnettes and have flat lintels set within paired segmental arches. Second floor windows are generally similar but lack transoms and superposed colonnettes. Paired third floor windows have pointed arches and colonnette mullions.

(Center section): Two second floor windows above Courthouse entrance are set within cusped pointed arches and have colonnette-ornamented jambs. AD 1871 is carved on pier between second floor windows of second section. The third floor windows are embraced by pointed arches "supported" by colonnettes and have blind tympana.

Sheet iron shutters appear only on two windows on the north wall of the Courthouse.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Polychrome hexagonal slates cover steep mansard roofs of west front and tower.
- b. Cornice, eaves: City Hall and Courthouse: Masonry bracketed cornices are interrupted by pier buttresses and carry low parapets broken by dormers. Subsidiary cornice between second and third floors; center section of City Hall has smaller-scaled brackets above string course of pyramidal facets.

Courthouse: Masonry bracketed cornices are ornamented by dogtooth molding.

c. Dormers:

1. City Hall: The facade has two masonry dormers of different design, both with pointed roofs.
2. Courthouse: Three masonry dormers with pointed roofs; center dormer is larger than those flanking it.
- d. Tower: The tower terminates in a steep slate roof with dormers and clocks on the four sides. Tower is capped by a square lantern with triple arcaded lights. The original clock was purchased by New Haven as a town clock and placed in the tower of First Church of Christ, Congregational (Center Church) on New Haven Green in 1826 but was removed to the City Hall when it was built in 1861. (See HABS No. CONN-109).

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. City Hall, first floor: On the center axis there is a hall divided by a screen of three blunted arches on wide piers, with a grand staircase leading up to the council chambers.
- b. City Hall, second floor: Large offices flank the hallways on both the first and second floors.
- b. Courthouse, first floor: Three pointed arches with square piers ending in plaster foliated capitals partition the hallway and frame the cast-iron stairs.

2. Stairways:

- a. City Hall: The main stairway of cast-iron rises in a straight run with fourteen risers to a broad landing and continues for nine more risers to the second floor, 9'-9" above first floor. A railing with molded cast-iron bannisters surrounds the stairwell on both second and third floors.

Treads, pierced rinceau pattern risers, molded newel posts, bannisters and stringers are all of cast-iron. Rails are wooden. Pierced risers give an open end light character to the stairs.

A U-shaped cast-iron stairway leads through an arched opening to the third floor from the south side of the gallery surrounding the main stair. This stairway has a landing at midpoint.

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A skylighted, coved ceiling rises over the stairwell.

- b. Courthouse: The cast-iron stairs rise in a straight flight to a landing and continue to the second floor. The landing is supported by three very slender cast-iron columns; stringers are molded and patterned. Risers have a pierced geometric pattern.
3. Flooring: Narrow plank wooden flooring in City Hall, some vinyl tile; encaustic tile in entrance vestibule.
4. Doorways and doors: City Hall: rectangular openings of second floor hall doors have paneled reveals and are heavily framed by turned colonnettes on plinths capped by pointed arch moldings framing carved wooden tympana with geometric tracery. Minor doors are four-panel wooden doors with molded architraves.
5. Wall and ceiling finish: City Hall and Courthouse: Walls are plaster, scored and smooth. Ceilings are also plaster, paneled and coffered. Hallways in both City Hall and Courthouse have wainscots of beaded matchboarding trimmed at the top with a band of paneling. In the Courthouse this band is incised with quatrefoils.
6. Decorative features and trim: City Hall; the Council Chamber on the second floor is framed with slender cast-iron interior colonnettes.

Courthouse; the Traffic Court room is framed with slender cast-iron interior colonnettes.
7. Notable hardware: None.
8. Lighting: Modern electrical fixtures.
9. Heating: Modern central heat.

City Hall: Original marble mantelpiece in mayor's office.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: On the east side of Church Street facing New Haven Green between Elm Street on the east and Court Street on the south.
2. Outbuildings: There is a small gabled two-storied building in the rear of City Hall.

3. Landscaping: Stone benches and planters are installed in the angle between the Courthouse and City Hall. A black marble shaft holds an eternal flame in this ensemble.

Prepared by: Professor Woodrow W. Wilkins
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
August 17, 1964
and
Denys Peter Myers
Principal Architectural Historian
National Park Service
June 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Summer, 1964 New Haven Project, jointly undertaken by the HABS and the New Haven Preservation Trust, and financed by "Mission 66" funds of the National Park Service with assistance from the NHPT, following a 1963 HABS inventory survey of old New Haven carried out by the NHPT under the direction of Professor Christopher Tunnard of Yale University, President.

The project was under the direction of the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, and was supervised by Architect Woodrow W. Wilkins, Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky, assisted by Ned Goode, Photographer, Frazier, Pennsylvania; Annette H. M. Gottschalk, William P. Hersey, and Charles R. Tichy, Student Assistant Architects and students at Carnegie Institute of Technology, Yale University, and Iowa State University, respectively; and Jonathan B. Conant, Research Assistant and student at Yale University.

Addendum To
New Haven City Hall And Courthouse
Church Street
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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

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Department of the Interior
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